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## **Fostering responsible communities: a community social marketing approach to sustainable living**

### **Abstract**

Just as socially irresponsible organizational behavior leaves a punitive legacy on society, socially responsible organizations can foster curative change. This paper examines whether small organizations can foster societal change toward more sustainable modes of living. We contend that consumption is deeply intertwined with social relations and norms, thus making individual behavioral change toward sustainability a matter of facilitating change in individual behavior, as well as in social norms and relations between organizations and consumers. We argue that it is in this facilitation process that small firms can play a major role, by adopting upstream and downstream approaches to diffuse behavioral change. By synthesizing four key strands of literature - small businesses and corporate social responsibility, ethical consumption, community social marketing and the diffusion of innovation - and using the exemplar case of Modbury, the iconic 'plastic bag free' town, we demonstrate how responsible small firms can influence communities, and the individuals therein, to encourage environmentally sustainable practice to diffuse and support change in society.

**Keywords:** community - CSR - small business - social marketing – sustainability

## **Fostering responsible communities: a community social marketing approach to sustainable living**

### **Introduction**

Corporate behavior is increasingly under the scrutiny of informed, critical consumers and shareholders, and as a result of increasing public pressure, firms have turned to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR henceforth). CSR has been used by firms as a means to maintain and/or improve corporate reputation among a range of internal and external stakeholder groups (Maignan, Ferrell and Ferrell, 2005), and the growing interest in CSR is reflected in the extant literature (Vaaland, Heide and Gronhaug, 2008; Maignan and Ferrell, 2004). Traditionally, CSR discourse has been centered upon multinational corporations, but more recently there has been a burgeoning stream of literature giving attention to the relevance of small businesses and family firms in the CSR debate (Jamali et. al., 2008; Niehm et al., 2008). In this paper we use the example of the 'no plastic bag' campaign implemented by traders in the UK town of Modbury to critically examine and further shed light on the distinctive orientations of small firms in the context of CSR and collective change. Just as socially irresponsible organizational behavior leaves a punitive legacy on society, socially responsible organizations can foster curative change. Therefore, our paper seeks to address the following question: 'can responsible small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) help change society?' Specifically, we are interested in examining whether small organizations can foster societal change toward more sustainable and environment-friendly modes of living. Interest in CSR is a reflection of the manner in which issues around sustainability have moved up the public policy agenda in the UK and elsewhere, and an indication of how consumer boycotting (Friedman, 1996) has increased substantially over the past years. In a fragmented and often homogeneous marketplace, the ability to edit consumer choices with markers of discernment and differentiation such as CSR are prized corporate and brand assets (Bendell and Kleanthous, 2007) for companies both large and small.

Ethical and environmental concern exists to a greater or lesser extent, and in various forms, within most countries (Carrigan and de Pelsmacker, 2009). For instance, the latest Ethical Consumerist Report (The Co-operative Bank, 2008) suggests that, despite the economic downturn, the total UK ethical market in 2007 was worth \$58.3 billion, which represents a 15% increase from \$50 billion in the previous year. Fairtrade now sells over 4,500 products in over twenty countries, reaching international sales of \$2.25 billion (Fairtrade Foundation, 2009a). A recent Nielsen Global Survey of 28,253 online consumers found that 98% of respondents in Latin America expected companies to engage in programs that either protect the environment or society, as did 90% of respondents in other emerging markets (EEMEA) and Asia Pacific, and 85% of consumers in Europe (Nielsen, 2008).

Notably, the increased availability and convenience of green and ethical alternatives has had a major impact on the sales of such products in recent years (The Co-operative Bank, 2008; Mintel, 2007; Mintel, 2006; Mintel, 2005). Earlier studies (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001) suggest that price, value, quality, brand familiarity and convenience play key roles in green and ethical purchasing considerations. Retailers recognize the need to make green options more accessible and affordable (Carrigan and de Pelsmacker, 2009; Mintel, 2007), employing strategies such as Tesco UK's commitment to tackle energy consumption through reduced prices for low energy bulbs. These widening consumption desires and increased concerns about sustainability (Newholm, 2005) are, of course, likely to involve excess consumption in the name of the environment and, thus, what consumer researchers have portrayed as inconsistent behavior.

Nevertheless, some have problematized the appropriateness of assigning consumers co-responsibility for environmental reform (cf. Connolly and Prothero, 2008). Indeed, policy makers and social marketers are still calling for reduced levels of consumption as a step toward sustainability, and as a means to address environmental issues (cf. Peattie and Peattie, 2008). Consumers, in turn, are expected to regulate their consumption in an instrumental manner (Connolly and Prothero, 2008), and the existing

gap between consumers' positive attitudes toward sustainability and their inconsistent and often conflicting consumption behavior – what Boulstridge and Carrigan (2000) have called the attitude-behavior gap – remains a concern. Following Connolly and Prothero (2008) and Ward (2005), we view consumers as people engaged in meaningful and socially-embedded everyday practices, sustainable or otherwise, which involve the (symbolic) consumption (purchase, usage, and/or disposal) of material goods in one way or another. This stance, therefore, suggests a view of consumption as deeply intertwined with social relations and norms, thus making individual behavioral change toward sustainability a matter of facilitating change in individual behavior, as well as in social norms and relations between organizations and consumers (Jackson, 2005). We contend that it is in this facilitation process that small organizations can play a major role, by adopting upstream and downstream (Verplanken and Wood, 2006) approaches to diffuse behavioral change.

Successful habit change interventions involve disrupting the environmental factors that automatically cue habitual behavior. Verplanken and Wood (2006) define 'downstream' interventions as those that provide informational inputs at points when habits are vulnerable to change; for example, point-of-purchase advertisements that exhort the benefits of washing clothes at lower temperatures when and where consumers are shopping for laundry detergents. However, the everyday lifestyles of individuals can limit the effectiveness of downstream interventions that do not address the performance contexts and socio-structural factors that maintain habits. As an alternative, McKinlay (1975, 1993) suggests 'upstream' environmental interventions designed to prevent undesired outcomes. Upstream interventions take place before habit performance, and disrupt old environmental cues and establish new ones. In the case described later, small retail store owners can act as the catalysts for implementing upstream interventions that "target social norms and contextual supports for the desired action" (Verplanken and Wood, 2006, p.91).

We pursue answers to the question presented above through an examination of four key streams

of literature. The first concerns CSR in the context of SMEs, the role of the owner-manager as champions of responsible behavior in local communities, and how SMEs can be supported to fulfill their environmental performance potential. The second literature stream concerns behavioral change, as well as the incentives and barriers affecting environment-friendly behavior. We also explore the potential role played by the formation of habits and their relationships with situational cues and social norms in propagating, changing and reducing the inconsistencies between attitudes and behaviors, as well as the challenges posed by behavioral contradictions to policy makers and organizations promoting a sustainable agenda.

Thirdly, we examine how a community social marketing approach can help organizations to implement practices that can change society and encourage environment-friendly and sustainable behaviors. Although Peattie and Peattie (2009) have discussed the potential of social marketing to foster more sustainable forms of consumption, their article's main focus was the discursive reformulation of current social marketing theory to make it suitable to the context of consumption reduction. However, they fail to provide specific steps for organizations seeking to enable societal or community change through organizational practices. Therefore, we highlight relevant potential strategies for social marketers interested in advancing a fundamental attitudinal and behavioral change towards sustainable behavior. A fourth strand of literature discusses diffusion theory in the context of behavior change and the diffusion of new ideas and practices within a social system. This, in turn, enables us to explain, from a macro perspective, how responsible SMEs can help change society.

Finally, we illustrate our discussion by using Modbury, the iconic 'plastic bag-free' town, as a best-practice example of how organizations can assist the diffusion of new ideas through communities and foster sustainable consumer behavior. In their recent report on waste and litter, Friends of the Earth (2009) suggest that the average European dustbin has enough discarded energy for 5,000 hours of television, 500 baths, and 3,500 showers, and such wastage must be minimized if we are to meet current environmental footprint reduction targets. "Plastic shopping bags are one such product with a totemic role in the debate

about sustainable consumption when it comes to purchasing products from retailers. Although they have very real material impacts in terms of resource consumption and the generation of waste, their profile in the green and sustainable consumption debate is more easily explained by their role as symbol of a wasteful 'throw-away' society" (Peattie and Collins, 2009, p. 110). Modbury, a small town in Devon, became the first plastic bag-free town in Europe on April 28<sup>th</sup> 2007, when the town's traders unilaterally declared their independence from plastic bags by refusing to sell, give away or otherwise provide them to anyone in Modbury (Vidal, 2007). Modbury retailers did not simply raise awareness among shoppers that they should stop using plastic bags; they actually disrupted the behavior by removing the choice from shoppers in every retail outlet in the town. The value of this exemplar of organizational commitment to changing community and individual consumer attitudes is underlined by the success of Modbury retailers in maintaining the plastic bag ban beyond the pilot six-month period. This has since inspired imitators around the world – from Stroud to San Francisco - to learn the lessons of the Modbury model, and deliver similar community behavioral change in their towns and cities.

### **CSR and the Small and Medium Size Enterprise (SME)**

SMEs play a crucial role in the UK economy (Roberts et al., 2006), and are key players in any transition to a low carbon future, representing 99 per cent of all enterprises in the UK (BERR, 2008). SMEs also make up the vast majority of businesses in Europe and North America, and represent 90 per cent of business worldwide (Jamali et al., 2009). Within the category of SMEs fall 'craft enterprises' – those firms that provide a wide range of vital products and services at local level (European Commission, 2010) – many of which are very small firms run independently by their owner. Micro-enterprises, of which many are craft firms (i.e. carpenters, butchers, bakers, information technicians), face particular challenges due to their small scale, but are nonetheless an important segment of the European economy, providing vital products, services and jobs for local communities. In contrast to larger firms, the heads of these organizations are fully

involved in all aspects of the business and remain in direct contact with customers. According to the European Commission (2010), “whilst over 99 per cent of all enterprises in Europe are SMEs, 90 per cent of SMEs are actually micro-enterprises - with fewer than 10 employees - and the average company has just five workers. However, these micro-enterprises account for 53 per cent of all jobs in Europe, so their importance to the European economy is enormous.”

Despite this, little evidence exists about the environmental impact of such firms at either national or regional levels (Hillary, 2004). While the impact of individual SMEs on the environment is likely to be small, researchers agree that their collective impact is substantial (Jenkins, 2009; Spence et al., 2003; Tilley, 1999), suggesting that by adopting green measures this sector could make a significant contribution to global environmental sustainability.

#### *The importance and value of SMEs in fostering green and sustainable behavior*

Small firms often have significant, positive economic and social impacts in their communities (Roberts et al., 2006), and a social contribution that is estimated to be considerably higher than large corporations (DTI, 2002). For example, a decision by local retailers and market traders to stock produce from local suppliers can have a marked impact on the sustainability of local food chains, as well as community and economic regeneration (McEachern et al., 2010). The interdependence of entities in a functioning network has been recognized (Lawrence et al., 2006), and with that the need to think beyond the interest of a single firm is paramount, alongside a more holistic consideration of the activities that businesses engage in, and how they affect the environmental and social contexts in which they operate.

Jenkins (2004) notes that SMEs are often seen as a problem within the CSR debate because of what some perceive as their failure to engage with it; an alternative view is that the CSR debate has failed



to engage appropriately with SMEs. Furthermore, questions have been raised about conventional approaches to CSR and business ethics, and their relevance to SMEs (Lawrence et al., 2006), particularly what has been referred to as the language problem in the CSR debate that is serving to alienate SMEs (Jamali et al., 2009). For example, SMEs are already engaged with a number of social, economic and environmental impacts, but do not generally use the language of CSR to describe it (Roberts et al., 2004). Vives (2006) suggests that SMEs may be willing to sacrifice some of their profits while serving a greater goal, while commentators note a certain amount of CSR falls 'under the radar' such that SMEs are often unknowingly socially responsible (Perrini, 2006; Jenkins, 2004).

#### *The owner- manager as 'champion'*

In order for CSR to work, an internal champion is required (Jenkins, 2009); in the case of SMEs, the owner-manager is directly responsible for directing those activities. SME behavior is often understood in terms of the psychological characteristics of the owner-manager, which influence the firm's approach to CSR since ownership and control often lie with the same individual (Jenkins, 2009). Although this lends considerable autonomy to decision making, the number of business tasks that SME owners are responsible for mitigate against a focus that is beyond day-to-day operations (Tilley, 2000). Fuller and Tian (2006) propose that when studying small firms an understanding of the dynamics between responsible behavior, relationships, social and symbolic capital is important, as it has the potential to address the question, 'what is an appropriate theory of social responsibility in SMEs'? This stems from the belief that a social perspective on SMEs is significant (Reynolds, 1991), and that for small business owners, relationships are crucial (Fuller and Lewis, 2003). Fuller and Tian (2006) suggest that SME owners are often inseparable from the business in terms of values, policies and practices; the personal motives and ethics of

owner-managers and the responsible behavior demonstrated by SMEs are interrelated (Lawrence et al., 2006; Carr, 2003). Tilley's (1999) study of SME owners concurs, and notes the importance that the owner's ethics and moral conscience play in shaping and motivating environmental behavior.

Further, it has been suggested that a dialogue strategy (Graafland et al., 2003), and social interaction with stakeholders are often critical in shaping responsible behavior by SMEs (Fuller and Tian, 2006), as is the symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) possessed by the firm. Fuller and Tian (2006, p. 288) argue that the construction of social capital by SMEs is likely to be "constituted through the inherent values" of the business owner and key stakeholders such as customers and the community. Their study of small, owner-managed firms led them to suggest that SMEs may try and increase their symbolic capital through responsible and ethical behaviors. SMEs act responsibly because their legitimacy with stakeholders such as the local community is at stake in a far more direct and personal way than it is for larger corporations. Rather than operating complex, hierarchical corporate structures, many SMEs are simple organizations, sometimes headed and operated entirely by an owner-manager whose attitudes and behavior influence the decisions made within the firm. SMEs also tend to rely on informal networks for information (Rothenberg and Becker, 2004), for example, local trade associations, reaffirming a role for social influence variables such as attitudes and norms on the adoption of sustainable decision making (Cordano et al., 2010).

Southwell (2004) identified that SMEs believe they should pay significant attention to their social and environmental responsibilities. There is evidence that SMEs are engaging more with a CSR agenda (Jenkins, 2009, p.23), and that the image of the "profit-maximizing, rational economic entrepreneur" is a fabrication. Frequently motivated by personal moral convictions rather than business reasons (Habisch, 2004), the actions of SMEs play a crucial part in helping to overcome social problems. However, the motivational pressures that engage SMEs are not the same as those for large companies; issues closer to home are more likely to hold their attention (Jenkins, 2009; Baker, 2003). For SMEs, CSR represents the

owner's values, supporting the local economy and community, as well as a simple desire to 'survive'; research suggests it is primarily moral and ethical arguments rather than business reasons that underpin their commitment to it (Jenkins, 2009). In Jenkins's (2009) study, most SMEs felt uncomfortable about commercially exploiting their CSR activities, but were happy to promote a CSR agenda and encourage others to become more socially and environmentally responsible. Jenkins (2009) argues this is an important distinction; to engage SMEs in CSR, a focus that promotes a wider take up rather than the business benefits is a message that is well received.

#### *Can SMEs impact environmental sustainability?*

In terms of policy, the numbers, heterogeneity and low visibility of smaller enterprises pose a challenge to CSR. Many CSR tools and techniques, as well as environmental solutions have been developed for and by larger firms, and cannot necessarily be applied to small firms (Tilley, 1999). They cannot be treated as scaled-down versions of large businesses, and possess distinctive characteristics that influence how they engage with challenges and opportunities (Blackburn and Smallbone, 2008). Such characteristics include limited resources (financial, managerial, skills and knowledge), an organizational culture dominated by the owner-manager, a preference for less formal approaches to business management, and low levels of awareness and reluctance to access advice and support that is available (Roberts et al., 2006).

Tilley (1999) identified that often SME owner-managers suffer from a low standard of eco-literacy and poor environmental awareness, and while they may possess pro-environmental attitudes, can experience difficulties translating these aspirations and values into actions. In Tilley's study (1999), environmental impact reduction was considered a cost burden not to be passed to customers, while

awareness of the environment-business support available was poor. These barriers accumulated into powerful resistant forces acting upon the small firm owners, which prevented them from acting to reduce the gap between their environmental attitudes and behavior. Tilley (1999) concludes that SMEs are not fulfilling their environmental performance potential, partly because support needs to be targeted to individual needs (Roberts et. al, 2006), for example, by focusing on a small geographical area or specific sector.

Lawrence et al., (2006) identify three key barriers to SME adoption of environmental practices: the perception that they have little individual impact on the environment, the lack of expertise and understanding of environmental issues, and cost (i.e. there are few financial benefits). The lack of progress that has emerged from the uncritical transfer of tools and strategies designed for larger firms to SMEs suggests small firms may need a different approach to encourage the uptake of CSR and sustainability (Lawrence et al., 2006). In posing the question, what mechanisms will help “enlighten and empower” SMEs to act responsibly, Tilley (1999) suggests that a ‘hearts and minds’ campaign is needed to persuade small firms of the need for them to improve their environmental performance, as well as opportunities for SME owner-managers to become engaged in the environmental debate and develop solutions appropriate to their own business. In particular, she advocates a twin-track approach based on three key perspectives – the ethical, the economic and the managerial - that strengthens the driving forces whilst weakening the resistant forces to responsible actions.

Although resource constrained, SMEs possess certain behavioral advantages (BERR, 2009), including their ability to respond more rapidly, flexibly, and efficiently to customer needs than larger organizations. Furthermore, the gap between rhetoric and implementation (Grayson and Hodges, 2004) may be smaller in SMEs compared to larger organizations, due to the closeness of the owner-manager to day-to-day operations, and so easier to overcome (Jenkins, 2009). They are likely to be more embedded in

their local economy and environment, not necessarily driven by profit maximization, and rely on reputation and trust for many business activities. These characteristics are considered supportive of environmentally and socially responsible behavior, as is the need for community involvement in decision making (Lawrence et al., 2006). More recently, a growing number of studies are examining how networks and alliances influence the engagement of SMEs with environmental and, more broadly, sustainable practices (Lawrence et al., 2006). Support networks, defined by Holt et al. (2000, p.34) as a group or groups of “organizations or individuals who are able to offer assistance, advice or other forms of support on a specific problem or issue”, may be able to help SMEs traverse barriers that prevent them from adopting sustainable practices (Revell and Rutherford, 2003; Simpson et al., 2004). SME owner-managers are more able to influence the wider environment if they collaborate with their peers and other stakeholders (Jenkins, 2009); even competitors may be seen as key stakeholders in this context.

SMEs prefer advice that is company-specific and face-to-face (Simpson et al. 2004), and networks have also shown efficacy in motivating continued participation in sustainable activity (Friedman and Miles, 2001). Therefore, the ability that networks have to provide specialized information and mentoring may be a way to encourage and sustain socially and environmentally responsible behavior among SMEs (Lawrence et al., 2006).

### **The Challenges of Individual and Collective Behavioral Change**

The question of whether responsible SMEs can help change society also implies an overall belief that individual and collective change is difficult not only to initiate, but also to sustain (Jackson, 2005). Indeed, the challenges related to behavioral change have been extensively analyzed within the consumer behavior and social marketing literature, and one of the main issues related to behavioral change is the gap between individuals' professed desire to change and their actual behavior. Such literature is relevant to the

SMEs context addressed in this paper. In order to foster change SMEs must engage with consumers, so a brief review of the challenges and practices involved in individual and collective consumer behavior change is warranted.

### *Mind the Gap*

Caruana (2007) argues that the emphasis on positivist perspectives across the green and ethical consumption literature has led to a bias toward research examining the cognitive aspects of individual behavior and behavioral change (Chatzidakis et al., 2007; Shaw, 2005; Shaw and Clarke, 1999; Shaw and Shiu, 2003; Shaw et al., 2000; Sparks and Shepherd, 1992; Ajzen, 1991; Bagozzi, 1993; Bagozzi and Warshaw, 1990). However, such theories pay scant attention to habits or the social processes, contexts, and incentive structures that embed behavior. Researchers adopting qualitative methodologies (e.g. Chatzidakis et al., 2007; Chatzidakis et al., 2004; McDonald et al., 2006; McEachern et al., 2007; Newholm, 2005) have also theorized such attitude-behavior discrepancies at the level of individual agency within the context of ethical and green consumption, and while acknowledging the potential influences of peer pressure, social norms and habits, McDonald et al. (2006) note that a deeper discussion on the role of such constructs is neglected in their study.

Yet, marketers interested in behavioral change should not neglect the social processes embedding behavior and behavioral change. Barnett et al. (2005) prefer to position consumerism as a sociable practice with a collective force; one that reflects the context of social life, such as being a good parent, friend or citizen, and which is often a manifestation of the consumption opportunities and resources available. In their view, behavior change is more attainable by providing ways and means to routine behavior change through organized activities conducted by a variety of “collective actors” (Barnett et al., 2005, p. 47). Thus, it is more difficult not to be an ethical consumer if you live in an area populated by fair trade outlets, co-operatives, organic retailers and charity shops, than if you live in food desert areas.

### *Working with, Rather than Against, Behavioral Inconsistencies*

Interpretive studies (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001) have also problematized attitude-behavior gaps, and the number of behavioral inconsistencies enacted around 'conscious consumption' (Szmigin et al., 2009; McEachern, et al., 2007). Newholm (2005), on the other hand, argues that these so-called inconsistencies can actually be seen as coherent if we look at how people actually live, constrained as they are by what it is possible to attain each day through, for example, lack of alternatives, constrained finances or product confusion (Mayo and Fielder, 2006). Although people feel empowered and responsible for environmental issues at an individual level, this is coupled with the insecurities of not knowing what the 'right choices' are (Connolly and Prothero, 2008).

### *Acknowledging the Role of Norms, Habits and Environmental Cues*

Jackson (2005) reminds us that material goods play vital symbolic roles in our lives, and facilitate culturally embedded, complex social communication. This, in turn, suggests that rather than being rational decision-makers, we are usually 'locked in' to our inconsistent behavioral patterns due to factors such as restricted choice, inequality in access, institutional barriers and (lack of) incentive structures, habits, social norms, as well as expectations based on prevailing cultural values (Jackson, 2005).

According to Jackson (2005), consumers are constantly influenced by social norms – guidelines, principles for action, or controls for behavior as provided by a particular social group (Varman and Costa, 2008) and behavioral change must take place at the social level. Like Verplanken and Wood (2006) below, Jackson (2005) states that, although reasoned action and expectancy value models place cognitive processes as the drivers of behavior, in practice much everyday behavior occurs with little cognitive deliberation, which helps us to cope with information-dense environments. Jackson suggests that the processes of routinization of everyday behaviors makes them even less visible and perceptible to

consumers' cognitive deliberations; that for change to occur we must unfreeze habits, and make common practices visible and discursively available. Jackson (2005) also suggests that we must release behavioral lock-ins through the creation of appropriate institutional structures and incentives, with appropriate access to pro-environmental choice, grass-root community initiatives, and exemplar practices and policies.

As noted in the introduction to this paper, Verplanken and Wood (2006) are also concerned with structural interventions to change everyday behavior, and argue that informational interventions are unlikely to succeed, particularly in the long run, as they aim to change people's beliefs and intentions without tackling the socio-structural factors which sustain habits. They suggest that as consumers repeat everyday behaviors their decision-making withdraws, and such behaviors tend to become mechanically prompted by contextual and environmental factors. Therefore, 'inconsistency-reduction' interventions entail disrupting the environmental factors that prompt habitual behavior in the first place (Verplanken and Wood, 2006). As noted earlier, the authors suggest two possible routes to habit change, namely a 'downstream plus' approach, in which information is provided at points in which habits are susceptible to change (e.g. 'eat well' posters in hospitals, surgeries, workplaces and schools), combined with an 'upstream' approach, in which critical features of the behavior performance environment are disrupted and re-created prior to the occurrence of the habitual behavior (e.g. fast-food vending withdrawn; health food choices introduced). Upstream approaches are aimed at altering structural conditions that embed consumer behavior, and encompass economic incentives, legislation, environmental design, technological development and norms; the stronger the habits the bigger the need for upstream interventions (Verplanken and Wood, 2006). While downstream interventions aim to alleviate existing negative outcomes, upstream interventions aim to prevent them occurring in the first place.

Therefore, organizations interested in advancing sustainable lifestyles must bring such environmental impacts into consumers' and their own everyday discursive consciousness (Jackson, 2005),



and facilitate change through the implementation of targeted and effective 'downstream plus' and 'upstream' interventions (Verplanken and Wood, 2006).

### **Enabling Community Change through Organizational Responsibility**

The social marketing literature seems particularly relevant in terms of the strategic and tactical contribution that it can make toward facilitating the change process discussed above, which has been acknowledged elsewhere (e.g. Hastings and Saren, 2003). However, diffusion theory can shed some light on how the diffusion of new ideas and practices within society takes place, which in turn will facilitate an enhanced understanding, from a broader perspective, of how responsible SMEs can help change society. Both are reviewed below.

#### *Community Social Marketing*

Although Peattie and Peattie (2009) comment on the potential of social marketing to encourage sustainable consumption, they do not offer specific guidelines for organizations seeking to enable community and/or societal change through organizational practices; their key concern is the discursive reformulation of social marketing theory to make it distinct from commercial marketing (a concern already present in the authors' 2003 paper, as well as in Hastings, 2007) and appropriate to the context of consumption reduction. In order to address this gap, some of the practical behavioral change strategies and guidelines used in social marketing are discussed below.

Prochaska and DiClemente's (1983) encompassing Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change has been employed extensively in the social marketing literature, more specifically and practically, in the fight against unhealthy and risky behaviors (e.g. Prochaska and Velicer, 1997). The Transtheoretical Model is a way to integrate stages of readiness to perform a particular behavior, processes of behavior change,

self-efficacy (the extent to which people believe that they are capable of changing their behavior), and decisional balances, that is, the pros and cons of actual behavior change (Greenlee and Surprenant, 1999).

The five stages of behavioral readiness as described by the model are pre-contemplation (when individuals are still not thinking about changing their behavior); contemplation (when people are seriously considering changing their behavior); preparation (when individuals have tried to alter their behavior and are seriously considering trying again in the short-term); action (when behavioral change has occurred in the last six months); and maintenance (behavioral change has been maintained for more than six months). Viewing behavioral change as a process allows us to see certain types of discrepancies between attitudes and behavior as tentative change by individuals, and it also means that different stages of the process will require different interventions by SMEs seeking impact upon individual behavior in the context of sustainable consumption. The dimensions of decisional balance that affect behavioral change vary depending on which stage of change individuals find themselves. What this highlights is that for social and, by extension, environmental and sustainable marketing campaigns to be successful, effective segmentation and targeting based on stages of change must be carried out. This also stresses the importance of customizing upstream and downstream behavior change interventions to each specific stage segment targeted by a particular social/environmental/sustainability campaign. Indeed, the stages of change can help reduce resistance and non-commitment, and increase participation and progress toward change (Prochaska, Prochaska and Levesque, 2001).

Furthermore, McKenzie-Mohr (1999)'s strategies for community-based social marketing add to the model discussed above. While the Transtheoretical Model can be used for segmentation, targeting and the outlining of specific interventions according to individuals' stages of change, McKenzie-Mohr's (1999) community-based social marketing emphasizes the relevance of grassroots engagement, and provides practical guidelines for community initiatives, social marketers and policy makers interested in advancing sustainable levels of consumption and development. McKenzie-Mohr's (1999) community-based social

marketing framework encompasses integrated downstream and upstream approaches that tackle issues related to routines, habits, norms, barriers, and incentives. Community-based social marketing comprises four key steps: identifying barriers to change through community-based research; outlining a strategy that uses change tools (including the creation of commitment amongst members, implementation of behavioral prompts, development of new norms, communication of effective messages, creation of incentives, and making it convenient to act); piloting the strategy; and evaluating the outcomes. All these steps can be used to tackle behavioral inconsistencies and change toward sustainable modes of living both at small and large-scale levels; an illustrative exemplar of which is discussed later in this paper.

#### *Diffusion theory, catalytic individuals and community*

The study of diffusion refers to the “general process of adopting and incorporating innovations into routine practice” (Lomas, 1993), and one way to think about sustainable consumption is to conceptualize it as a social innovation (Fell et al., 2009). The Diffusion of Innovation literature covers a range of topics: stages of innovation diffusion, diffusion networks, adopter categories, rate of innovation diffusion (Cavusgil, 2007), and more recently the role of catalytic individuals (Fell et al., 2009). Diffusion theory draws on a range of disciplines, and the literature features numerous examples of diffusion, including hybrid corn (Ryan and Gross, 1950); information technology (Simpson, 2005), and CSR (McManus, 2008). Rogers (2003) developed the model of technology adoption that divides adopters into categories – *innovators*, *early adopters*, *early majority*, and *laggards* – and according to this author word of mouth is the primary driver of innovation diffusion, which takes place within particular social groups and social systems. He argues that there is a powerful influential role to be played by opinion leaders and change agents in diffusing innovation in a community through their social networks. However, the communication process is more complex than simple persuasion of community members to explore a new idea or undertake a new activity (Simpson,

2005). Both Dearing et al. (2006) and Craig-Lees (2008) advocate the diffusion of innovation and social marketing principles to stimulate the dissemination of effective behavior change, particularly to intermediaries who make delivery decisions on behalf of other individuals. While the literature about diffusion of innovations and social marketing set out with different intents (i.e. diffusion scholars seek to describe and explain the process of social change; social marketing scholars seek to demonstrate how to change behavior in pro-social directions), the two approaches exhibit similarities and are complementary (Craig-Lees, 2008; Dearing et al., 2006).

Dearing et al. (2006) support the societal sector or 'community' as the locus of change, and suggest researchers focus upon gaining an understanding of the informal structures that tie a chosen community's organizations together. Particularly relevant is the role of networks in diffusing a new idea or technology within a social system (Valente and Davis, 1999). Diffusion theory accentuates the value of social networks or interpersonal channels as drivers of innovation adoption decisions, emphasizing the role of opinion leaders and mavens, or 'catalytic individuals' (Greenhalgh et.al., 2005; Fell et al., 2009). Most people assess a new idea based on a subjective evaluation of someone like themselves who has previously adopted that idea (Rogers, 2003). These 'influential individuals', also referred to as 'mavens' or 'catalytic individuals' display two key attributes: they have a detailed or specialist knowledge about the innovation, and they are perceived as a trusted and reliable source of information by others in their social network (Fell et al., 2009). Often they play a role in setting and normalizing the standards for their social circles, and by their attitude and behavior, establish an innovation as socially acceptable. To date, few studies have addressed the concept of 'pro-environmental mavens', or the diffusion of pro-environmental behaviors, an exception being the recent study by Fell et al., (2009) on behalf of the UK's Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Their study noted how an early adopter group within a population experiments with a new idea or behavior, and on the basis of that experimentation, an early

majority begin to take it on board; a late majority follow on, with the laggards being the last to adopt the innovation.

The process of adoption involves the pathway from innovation to normality; from where the idea arrives in the social network to “it being a social norm that actually characterizes that network” (Fell et al., 2009, p130). When it comes to changing people’s behavior, engaging diverse groups of community members and a broad range of community organizations - for example, small traders or local residents groups - can assist the diffusion process across different sectors of the community (Simpson, 2005). Yet, the integral relationship between diffusion of an idea and the social setting of the local context in which it is introduced is often overlooked by policy advisers (Rogers, 2003). Indeed, as argued by Fell et al. (2009), there are determined factors that may affect the diffusion and adoption of a social innovation, which include, among others: the relative advantage or the perceived potential benefits associated with adoption of a new behavior; the ability to try new behaviors; the ability to see the benefits of adopting such behaviors through other people’s adoption; the nature of the group (new behaviors will spread faster among groups of like-minded people); the fact that new behaviors may evolve and be altered along the process of diffusion; the norms, roles and social networks through which new behaviors diffuse; catalytic individuals, who affect the pace of diffusion; the ways in which catalytic individuals choose to communicate about the new behaviors; the ability of a new behavior to co-exist with existing social patterns and behaviors; and the presence of conducive infrastructures, which support the desired behaviors. Most of these factors were present in Modbury, which is case-studied below.

### **Community Change through Organizational Responsibility**

The empirical component of this paper entails a single instrumental case study (Stake 1995) based on secondary data sources. The Modbury case (see Table 1 below) was chosen using a purposive

sampling approach where the intention was to select a case that “shed light” (Jamali et al., 2009, p.361) on the particular phenomenon of the role of local traders to diffuse new ideas across society in the context of small business CSR. The “logic and power of purposeful sampling” lies in selecting information-rich cases to study in depth, whereby one can learn a “great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p.230). As suggested by Ritchie and Lewis (2003), this type of case study is detailed and intensive (Bryman, 2001; Platt, 1988); the phenomenon is studied in context (Cresswell, 1998; Yin, 1993; 1994), and several data collection methods are used (Creswell, 1998; Robson, 2002). The authors collated information about the Modbury case from early 2007, when the campaign was first launched, until 2010. Data source triangulation was achieved by drawing the secondary data from a number of sources (Yin, 1994; Tellis, 1997) that included: newspaper articles, documentation and feature stories; online blogs, YouTube, and websites run by the Modbury community; companion websites that featured the Modbury story such as Modbury Town Chamber of Commerce and Information web pages (<http://www.modburydevoninfo.co.uk/>) and the Marine Conservation Society’s ‘Adopt-a-Beach’ website (<http://www.adoptabeach.org.uk>). The material was downloaded over the period specified above, and data analysis took place once all the documents were collated. Data analysis was carried out by the lead author using a deductive approach framed by the social marketing and diffusion theories presented in previous sections. The approach adopted is consistent with template analysis, which allows researchers to thematically analyze any type of textual data, and requires the preparation of a ‘coding template’ containing key codes deemed relevant and useful by the researcher being organized in a logical manner (King and Horrocks, 2010; King, 1998). Our template was based entirely on *a priori* codes, which were determined prior to the start of the analysis. Data texts were then read, and segments of data were marked and, thus, linked to relevant *a priori* codes. This careful, template-based review of relevant documents, newspaper articles, online blogs, and websites helped to illuminate the question under study (Jamali et al., 2009). Several authors have noted the unique strength of case studies in terms of their ability to present rich and

detailed information (Bennett, 2001). Choosing a single case does present weaknesses in terms of generalizability and representativeness. However, Yin (1994) argues that case studies are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations (Jamali et al., 2009).

Insert Table 1 about here

### *The Case of Modbury, Devon*

Modbury is the home town of BBC filmmaker Rebecca Hosking who, while filming in the Pacific Ocean, witnessed the marine pollution and wildlife devastation caused by plastic waste. So, she decided to take action to try and ban plastic bags. Worldwide annual consumption of plastic bags is estimated at between 500 billion and 1.2 trillion ([www.reusablebags.com](http://www.reusablebags.com)), and while Hosking and others acknowledge that plastic bags may not be the most pressing or catastrophic aspect of the global waste problem (Pool, 2008), they represent an integral part of consumer life worldwide and are an iconic representation of our unsustainable lifestyles. Hosking identified plastic bags as an entry point to engage people in her community to change their behavior, echoing the view of green campaign group Greenpeace that they were a persuasive tool that linked people to the ecological worldview (Vidal, 2007). The environmental problems created by the disposal of plastic bags are considerable: plastic bags do not biodegrade; they photodegrade, breaking down into ever smaller pieces that contaminate soil, waterways and oceans. Ingested by wildlife who mistake them for food, they kill species such as turtles, seals, whales, and sea birds. Bangladesh banned plastic bags in 2002 having found they were responsible for the clogged drains that caused flooding in the monsoon season (Barkham, 2007), while urban and rural landscapes worldwide are blighted by the ubiquitous litter of plastic bags (Goodyear, 2007).

Acting as the 'catalytic individual' (Fell et al., 2009), Hosking's first move was to educate those retail owners who were friends, and 'like minded' individuals, using face-to-face engagement (Simpson et al. 2004). Such word of mouth communication has already been identified as a primary driver of innovation (Rogers, 2003), particularly when enacted through social groups. As Fell et al. (2009) note, the way in which catalytic individuals choose to communicate about new behaviors is a determining factor in the pace and effectiveness of diffusion. Hosking began by showing 'Message in the Waves' (see <http://www.adoptabeach.org.uk>), a film about the effect of plastic bags in the Pacific Ocean, to the people who owned and managed the local butcher and delicatessen. Their immediate action was to say they never wanted to use plastic bags again. Leveraging her unique position as a trusted member of the community, and an expert source of information, Hosking's message was taken on board by this group of early adopters within the Modbury traders. In the initial stages of the campaign, the retailers of Modbury were contemplating what was for them, an innovative idea. Up to this point they had been unaware of the need to adopt behavior change, and believed that providing plastic bags was an essential part of customer service.

To move them forward, Hosking took on the role of the "information-supplying activist" (Feddersen and Gilligan, 2001), and suggested the campaign to make Modbury a plastic bag-free town. Activists have been shown to be an important source of information for organizations and individuals, altering the decisions of firms and consumers, and enhancing the social welfare of market exchange (Feddersen and Gilligan, 2001). Hosking adopted the mantle of 'internal champion' (Jenkins, 2009) on behalf of the small retailers in Modbury, communicating directly with the owners of each business. Rod Baker, director of Bags2Keep, a business in Cornwall that now supplies Modbury with alternative bags, noted:

"Her strength [was] that she's an ordinary person who talks to ordinary people in simple language about something they care about. She's totally committed" (Vidal, 2007).



Recognizing that information alone was unlikely to have an effect on the retailers' behavior (Hastings, 2007; Simpson, 2005), in conjunction with the first few retailers she got on board, Hosking organized an event in a local art gallery to show 'Message in the Waves, and invited every trader in town to attend. Harnessing the enthusiasm of the early adopter group and their status in the retail community, as well as their peer powers to encourage others to support the campaign, Hosking ensured a momentum for her idea that did not simply rely on her own authority (Simpson, 2005). Knowing that these owner-managers had the autonomy to implement the behavior change she was seeking, Hosking used the downstream interventions of environmental education and information to increase the self-efficacy of the traders to perform this new behavior (Verplanken and Wood, 2006), and persuade them of the benefits of adopting this new way of operating (Fell et al., 2009). This also served to overcome any problems of low eco-literacy and environmental awareness that Tilley (1999) identified among SMEs. Illustrating how important it is to take a social perspective on innovation diffusion among SMEs (Dearing et al., 2006; Reynolds, 1991), and recognizing the relationships that existed among this community of small traders, Hosking encouraged those individuals to become, what was in effect, the early majority. Achieving the commitment from the majority of Modbury traders to attend the film night was the first step in leading the organizations to subsequently agreeing to a much larger promise, i.e., eschewing plastic bags. Commitment techniques have been proven successful in galvanizing support from the retail sector towards sustainable behaviors (Shipee and Gregory, 1982); Hosking harnessed the dynamics of the relationships, social and symbolic capital (Fuller and Tian, 2006) that already existed in Modbury, capitalized on her own local persona and used a direct appeal to the traders to change how their organizations behaved (McKenzie-Mohr, 1999). Fell et al. (2009, p. 72) note that a necessary condition for influencing others is that the influencer is homophilos [i.e. similar, like-minded] with those they aim to influence; someone who is too different, too far from the existing social norms of the group, is unlikely to be given credibility as an "appropriate and authoritative figure". Commitment was increased not only by the use of a verbal and

written pledge (i.e., a voluntary agreement signed in the form of a chamber of trade letter), but also through actively involving the traders as co-creators in the campaign (McKenzie-Mohr, 1999; Moraes, et al., 2010).

As a manager from the much larger Plymouth and South West Co-op noted:

“We’re really pleased to get behind this. It was an initiative which was started by local traders. They asked us to get involved and we were delighted to do so” (BBC, 2007).

Acting as a trusted ‘bridge’ between what she had witnessed in Hawaii and the traders of Modbury, Hosking successfully connected the UK retailers with the potential their behaviors had to injure others and the environment (Chatzidakis et al., 2004). She then engaged in one-to-one conversations with those traders who had not attended, harnessing the momentum achieved at the gallery meeting to successfully persuade them to come on board; such personal connections are key drivers for both innovation diffusion and responsible behavior change within SMEs (Rogers, 2003). As the campaign took hold, those traders who had not yet signed up began to recognize that their legitimacy in Modbury was at stake in a very direct and personal way (Fuller and Tian, 2006). A tipping point was reached in the ‘hearts and minds campaign’ (Tilley, 1999) when nearly all traders were on board, and those who were less persuaded became reluctant to be left out as the only traders not willing to engage in the community’s environmental campaign. Whether the change in the traders’ behavior came about because they believed this behavior was the ‘right thing to do’ (Jenkins, 2009), or whether it was because there was a tangible consequence to not complying (i.e., social censure), compliance occurred. This pathway from innovation to normality (Fell et al., 2009) reflects Jackson’s (2005) view that social norms reprimand or encourage certain behavioral choices among groups, while also serving as cultural rules, fostering emotionally fulfilling social and socially-embedded market relationships (Cordano et al., 2010; Varman and Costa, 2008). Gaining commitment from the majority of the retailers established community norms (i.e. a tipping point) that encouraged other organizations in the town to behave more sustainably *en masse* (McKenzie-Mohr, 1999).

In less than a month, all 43 traders in Modbury were persuaded to replace plastic bags with various alternatives such as reusable cloth bags or cornstarch paper, and were prepared to fund the campaign collectively themselves by contributing fifty pounds sterling each. This paid for bag designs, poster printing, a website (Hosking, 2009), and information cards. A key aspect of diffusing new ideas and influencing behavioral change is to identify barriers, and remove as many as possible (Fell et al., 2009; McKenzie-Mohr, 1999); in other words, tackle the 'powerful resistant forces' that act upon the SME owner and prevent engagement with behavior change (Tilley, 1999). These may be internal to the individual, or structural changes that are needed to make the desired behavior more convenient for the community. Downstream interventions act to reduce inconsistency, disrupt the environmental factors that lead to habitual behavior (Verplanken and Wood, 2006); in this case, the operational habits of the traders of Modbury. These, in turn, impacted on the expectations and purchase behavior of Modbury customers. It was evident in Modbury that each shop had different product requirements in terms of size, appearance, strength or material; the hat shop and the art gallery needed decorative bags, while the butcher and delicatessen had more hygiene requirements. If behavioral change was to take place, providing functional alternatives targeted to the individual needs of each store was essential to enabling the individual traders to achieve their goal (Roberts et al., 2006), and overcome customer resistance to what might be construed as new (and potentially less effective) forms of packaging. Hosking employed the kind of 'twin track' approach Tilley (1999) advocates in order to increase progress towards change whilst weakening any residual resistance. By removing the task of researching the environmental product market from the traders, and undertaking it herself, she traversed some of the barriers to sustainable action (Revell and Rutherford, 2003) by providing the shop owners with the names of wholesalers who could supply individually tailored sustainable bags and wrappers (Barkham, 2007). Hosking admits there was a certain amount of effort required to identify such supportive infrastructure, but emphasizes that engaging these diverse

organizations in problem solving helped accelerate the diffusion process across the different retail network members (Fell et al., 2009; Hosking, 2007).

McKenzie-Mohr (1999) argues that while perceived norms can have a substantial effect upon community behavior, to be effective and thus co-exist comfortably within existing social patterns (Fell et al., 2009) the norm must also be visible, and developed through direct contact between people rather than through campaigns. An overt, easily identifiable symbol of the new approach was to be the 'Modbury bag' (Vidal, 2007). To this effect, two thousand special edition, generic 'Modbury' fair trade, recycled cotton bags were commissioned by the local traders to sell at a non-profit price to customers (Chalmers, 2007). The Modbury traders demonstrated the same reluctance to commercially exploit their CSR activities as those SMEs in Jenkins's (2009) study. Rather, they were more comfortable encouraging others to take up the 'bag challenge', with the view that what was good for Modbury as a town, was good for business (Barkham, 2007). Transition was further helped by the upstream intervention (Verplanken and Wood, 2006) provided by Plymouth and South West Co-operative (the local supermarket), who donated a Fairtrade reusable and environmentally-friendly bag to every household in Modbury. A letter was sent to all residents wrapped around the free cotton bags to trigger local people's engagement with the campaign, suggestive of the prompt that Jackson (2005) advocates as necessary to release behavioral 'lock-ins' (Jackson, 2005). By providing retailers with in-store alternatives, as well as tackling substitutes for their customers, Hosking gave the SMEs an incentive to participate while impairing the "automatic cuing of well-practiced responses" about the cost of alternatives to plastic bags, thus enabling the performance of new actions (Verplanken and Wood, 2006, p. 96).

What began as a six-month trial became a permanent voluntary, community project, one that has enacted behavioral change within both the retail and consumer communities that support the enduring plastic bag ban. The customized interventions used to support traders throughout each stage of the process successfully balanced the pros and cons of behavioral change (Greenlee and Surprenant, 1999),

helped reduce resistance and non-commitment, and accomplished participation across the community (Prochaska, Prochaska and Levesque, 2001). The actions also had a spillover effect into other sustainable practices (Thogersen and Olander, 2006): the florist has swapped ribbon with raffia, the delicatessen uses paper bags instead of plastic boxes, and the butcher has replaced all his fridges and vacuum packers with fuel efficient models (Pool, 2008). Even the large trader, Plymouth and South West Co-op, went on to trial plastic bag free shopping in six other towns in Devon and Cornwall. Today it is the traders who run the campaign, order the bags and make sure the day-to-day is running smoothly (Hosking, 2007; Vidal, 2007), and a 'How to do it' toolkit has been set up by Hosking (see [www.plasticbagfree.com](http://www.plasticbagfree.com) and [www.adoptabeach.org.uk](http://www.adoptabeach.org.uk)) in response to the numerous requests for her and the traders to take their campaign to other communities. The community network that has been established provides the specialized information and mentoring that helps encourage and sustain the socially responsible behavior among the retailers (Fell et al., 2009; Lawrence et al., 2006). Traders believe that their ban has affected how the community thinks about sustainable behavior in a wider sense, as well as the town's connections to global society. This, in turn, is driving new collective initiatives such as mass beach clean ups (Pool, 2008).

Although in the initial stages of behavior change no government or large organizational support was involved, subsequent upstream and downstream interventions have helped sustain the momentum. One example is the UK government's voluntary agreement with the British Retail Consortium to set targets for reducing the number of plastic bags given out by retailers. These targets have been successfully achieved with a 48% reduction in single plastic bag usage (WRAP, 2009). Modbury traders have been credited with starting this "small green revolution" in the UK (Vidal 2009, p. 9), which now includes major retailers such as Wal-Mart Asda, who have invested £3 million to help customers change the habits of a lifetime, and cut the number of single-use bags in their stores by 53%.

## Conclusion

This paper presents relevant theoretical frameworks that we suggest are helpful in conducting further research on SMEs (Jamali et al., 2009), and more effective in framing how SMEs can help change communities than theory developed within the traditional CSR discourse of multinational corporations. There is a demand for sector-specific case study material targeted at SMEs to help them understand the risks and opportunities of CSR for their business. 'Learning from others' (Roberts et al., 2006) with best practice case studies that are tailored to the needs of different SME audiences is a pathway that has already been identified (Smith et al, 2000). The illustrative case represents solidarity at a local level that addresses the larger issues, sustained by community networks and other organizations that engage in collective action beyond the state or market. The preponderance of independent traders within the retail network that changed Modbury (only the Co-op was part of a chain) was a considerable advantage; such organizations are seen as significant enablers that mobilize the latent energies of people to take control of their lives for the better. Fell et al., (2009) argue that network conditions are a major factor influencing diffusion, but that relatively little is known about the composition and conditions of actual social networks. In particular, they suggest research that seeks to understand the inter-relationships between different, overlapping social networks, and the identification of those factors that could indicate a network's readiness to make rapid shifts in social norms. Recent research (Thake, 2008) has argued that the local level is where community change has to take place; investing in society this way allows a shared narrative to emerge, and drives new forms of action and engagement that, in turn, can reinvigorate existing and establish new forms of agency. By forming 'community coalitions', involving partnering and support, there is a role for SMEs to act as catalysts for change in the communities in which they operate.

The ability of the small retailers in Modbury to enact sustainable change in their community is evidence of the importance of SMEs within the CSR debate. To date their contribution has only received limited recognition (Jamali et al., 2008). According to Prahalad and Hammond (2002) big corporations

should solve big problems, perpetuating the traditional perspective that mainstream discourse in CSR remains focused upon larger firms (Fuller and Tian, 2006). For SMEs, issues closer to home are far more likely to be salient, stemming from the nature of their business being largely personal. This leads them to act more responsibly because their local community is at stake in a far more direct and personal way than with major corporations (Fuller and Tian, 2006). The collective duty of care shown by Modbury retailers toward their community and wider society challenges two key beliefs: that responsible organizations cannot help change communities and society at large, and that only big businesses can deal with big problems.

The exemplar discussed here may also offer, in part, some solution to the tensions that exist around the debate that marginal lifestyle changes offer only marginal improvements in environmental impact when urgent and ambitious changes are needed (Thøgersen and Crompton, 2009). Fell et al., (2009) endorse governmental mechanisms reaching down to the “ultra-local level”, where it might be more appropriate to work through established network channels. Hosking has said herself that the environmental successes of the community in this paper are both personal and collaborative achievements (Hosking, 2007), but also ones that can be replicated in other communities. Drawing on diffusion theory, it is evident that certain conditions may have shaped the spread of the ‘No Plastic Bags’ message within Modbury: a charismatic, informed, trusted and determined leader spearheading the campaign; a group of homophiles [like-minded] traders within an established social network; an innovation that could easily co-exist with existing norms and social patterns, and a local infrastructure that lent itself to the adoption of sustainable alternatives to plastic bags. However, Modbury should not be viewed as an isolated case. Inspired by the success of Modbury, many towns and cities across the world have sought to introduce plastic bag bans; on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2007 Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire launched its own campaign to be the largest plastic bag free town in Europe, supported by local traders, and emulating the tactics of Modbury (Anon., 2007). The world’s first Fairtrade town, Garstang in the UK, which pioneered the global Fairtrade Towns movement, was initiated by another catalytic individual, local veterinary surgeon and Oxfam campaigner Bruce

Crowther, who galvanized the town's retailers into selling, promoting and using Fairtrade produce in their stores (Fairtrade Foundation, 2009b; Carrigan and Szmigin, 2003). These exemplars reiterate the role of the catalytic individual and the importance of homophily in shaping behavior change – the belief that individuals are particularly likely to be influenced by people they perceive to be 'like me' (Rogers, 2003; Roch, 2005; Fell et al., 2009). Excessive social distance can deplete the impact of innovations; localized, opinion leaders and mavens operating within their own social networks have a powerful role to play in the diffusion of innovations. The absolute success of the Modbury traders in changing the behavior of their community compares favorably with what are often more fragmented eco-achievements by larger, national initiatives. For example, California is aiming to be the first state to ban plastic bags from grocery, convenience and other stores, following on from the San Francisco ordinance banning the distribution of plastic bags by chain stores and pharmacies (Lagos, 2010). Although the long term aim is for a statewide, uniform policy, collective action on such a large scale presents many challenges. While approaching behavioral change on national, regional or city-scale may be problematic, the lessons of Modbury can be enacted at the micro level, either within smaller city/town neighborhoods, or collective local communities (e.g. local high streets), empowering people to not necessarily achieve large scale transformation in society at large, but to "restructure the meanings of their own lives" (Moraes et al., 2010, p.278). Thus, we would argue that Thøgersen and Crompton's (2009) plea for governments and environmental organizations to campaign for more ambitious sustainable agendas may be more effective in dealing with public behavior inconsistencies if framed to include community networks as well as individual behavioral change.

This paper's key limitation encompasses its reliance on secondary data on a single case. However, this may also be viewed as its main strength in that it opens up a new agenda for further research on the positive impact that organizations can have on local communities and society. For example, future research could examine multiple case studies and compare varied approaches to behavioral change through organizational action, including the role of catalytic individuals in the diffusion of innovation. Also, there is



much scope for primary research comparing SMEs versus corporate approaches to change, as well as new studies examining owners and employees' beliefs about the impact their organizations can have on wider societal issues. Such studies would help shed more light not only on the question of whether, but also how responsible organizations can influence communities, and the individuals therein, to encourage new practices to diffuse and support change in society.

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### The Plastic Bag Free Town of Modbury

Modbury is a small town (pop. approx 1500; 760 households) dating from the 8<sup>th</sup> century and located in a region known as the South Hams in Devon, England, a predominantly rural landscape that attracts many tourists into the town and surrounding area. Modbury has approximately 43 traders, many of whom are members of the Modbury Chamber of Commerce. These include a Post Office (established in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century), a branch of LloydsTSB Bank, a health centre, blacksmith, dentist, veterinary clinic, art galleries, a branch of the Plymouth and South West Co-operative supermarket\* as well as a range of independent, owner-run shops, operating as micro-enterprises (European Commission, 2010). Some of these owners were innovators and early adopters of the 'no plastic bag' campaign. Rebecca Hoskin, the influential 'catalytic individual' who initiated the campaign, first showed 'Message in the Waves', the documentary about plastic bag pollution to her friend Adam Searle, who runs Mackgills Delicatessen, followed by Simon Wilkinson, owner of 'Wilkinsons', an independent master butchers, specialising in locally produced and free range meat. Roger and Helen Pickles (owners of two other outlets) joined in, along with Sue Sturton who owns 'Brownston Art Gallery'. The gallery hosted a meeting for all 43 of the town's traders at which 'Message in the Waves' was screened. By the end, not one trader wanted to continue to use plastic bags.

*\*[Plymouth and South West Co-operative were an independent co-operative established in 1859; they were taken over by the Manchester-based Co-operative Group in 2009].*

Table 1: Modbury Town and Traders